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AUTHOR Galloway, Elizabeth; Gray, Gordon
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ABSTRACT

The language experience approach to teaching beginning reading uses a child's own language and experiences as the basis for the first reading material or lessons. The approach integrates the language arts skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The steps suggested for a teacher to follow in utilizing this approach are: (1) oral expression by the child with another person acting as a recorder, (2) oral expression with a recorder doing most of the writing and the student making some contribution, (3) writing by the student with the aid of the teacher or another person, and (4) writing by the student alone. Suggestions are given for developing language arts activities to use in the language experience approach. They include developing activities and discussions which relate to touch, taste, sound, sight, and smell; using community resource people as stimuli for language experiences; integrating language experience with content areas; using media to build a background of experience; writing autobiographies or biographies; and using opportunities for practical writing. Thirteen specific activities are described in detail, and examples of student writing are provided. (MKM)

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LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE - A READING APPROACH

by

Elizabeth Galloway and Gordon Gray*
Clemson University

Language experience, as an approach in the teaching of reading, capitalizes on every experience the child has had and assures that there is "relevancy" in learning to read. To the reader in the language experience, reading is "what I think, hear, see, taste, smell, and touch. Other people have been reading long before I have. Someone wrote what they read. Sometimes they write what they read. I can write about my experiences and other people's experiences. Then I can read my own writing. I can read what other people have written, too!"

The language experience approach can be used in a variety of ways. There are essentially basic ways this approach may be incorporated into the reading program. They are:

1. Language experience used as the basic approach to teach developmental reading.
2. Language experience used as a remedial approach in teaching reading.
3. Language experience used as a supplementary approach in teaching reading.

Some of the advantages in using this approach in reading are:

1. In early stages of reading instruction, the student sees the teacher write and learns letter formation, left to right progression, a sight vocabulary, that words and sentences record thoughts, the rudiments in the mechanics of writing, and sequence in story formation.
2. The student is highly motivated to write about his own experiences and seeing his story in print.

Some disadvantages in using this approach in basic reading are:

1. There is no assurance that the child is getting the skills development that he needs. The teacher would have to seek other ways of checking on achievements in skills development.

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2. The vocabulary is not controlled and repetition of words may not be frequent enough to assure mastery level.

The basic objectives in a language experience approach are:

1. To develop an awareness of the experiences that the student has.
2. To share these experiences with others.
3. To share other people's experiences.
4. To integrate the language arts skills - listening, speaking, reading and writing.
5. To begin with actual experiences as a springboard for reading.
6. To develop or progress to the point where vicarious experiences, including reading itself, stimulate writing and further reading.
7. To show the practical aspect of language experience (communication with others.)
8. To show the creative aspect of language experiences (writing from imaginative experiences).
9. To provide the teacher with a method for individualized instruction.

Steps in language experience writing:

1. Oral Expression by the child with another person acting as a recorder.

   At this stage the class may dictate a story. The teacher would stimulate thinking by asking questions concerning experiences. In some instances, the teacher would arrange the experience. Most of the time there would be a development of an awareness of the experiences that students have already participated in. Some possible topics for group expression are:

   a. What Happened When We Came to School Today
   b. Our Lunch Today
   c. Recess at the Playground
   d. Our Library Period
   e. Our Visit to the Fire Department
   f. Mr. Jones, Our Principal

   Individuals may dictate their own experiences. The following topics may be considered:

   a. My Visit to the Dentist
   b. Going Shopping with Mother
   c. My Birthday Party
   d. My Father's Job

Some ways to motivate oral expression for writing are:

a. Have field trips.
b. Show pictures.
c. Read part of a story and let students supply ending.
d. Discuss personal experiences.
e. Use film or filmstrips.
f. Discuss what we do at school.
g. Read and discuss stories.

2. Oral Expression with the recorder doing most of the writing and the student making some contribution.

At this stage the student may write a word, name, or a simple sentence. A letter may be written by the group and the student fills in the salutation and/or signature. The student may fill in the blank to complete the sentence as follows:

My name is _____.

I like to _____.

I saw the _____.

My favorite TV program is _____.

Simple sentences may be written. For example:

The man is waving good-bye. (goes with a picture)

I ate an ice cream yesterday.

Mary rode the bus to school.

3. Student Writing with the aid of the teacher or another person.

At this stage the student is dependent on the teacher or an older student to give considerable help with his writing. The teacher is the key in the motivation for writing. She helps the child with his expression and records it in an acceptable way.

4. Student Writing with his own "know-how."

By this time the student has an adequate background of experience in writing. He is more observant and seeks his own motivation. His writing skills are developed to a desirable degree of competency and he knows ways of locating and seeking information. Some basic principles in the language experience approach in reading that should be observed are:

a. Students must have appropriate stimulating experience if they are going to write.

b. Students must become aware of the experiences that they have had through touch, sight, sound, taste and smell.

c. Teacher needs to arrange for new experiences for motivation through field trips, film, filmstrips, resource people, books, etc.

d. The language arts skills are integrated throughout the approach.

e. Teachers need to recognize the antagonistic aims of (1) free expression and (2) correctness and accuracy in mechanics of writing. (Preference is given to free expression with gradual teaching of correctness and accuracy in mechanics of writing.)

f. Teachers must provide instruction in the basic skills in reading and writing in order to assure success.

g. Teachers must provide ample time to develop the writing.

h. Adequate attention must be given to the reading of the stories by the individual and/or the group.

i. The teacher must stimulate pride in authorship.

j. Teacher should provide activities to reinforce enjoyment of other people's writing.

Suggestions for Developing Language Arts Activities in the Elementary School

1. Develop activities and discussions which relate to touch, taste, sound, sight, and smell.

   a. Discuss these activities or experiences, building concepts and interests in sensory words, sentences, and stories. The following topics could be developed:

      My First Visit to the Fire Department
      Things I Felt in the Touch Box
      The First Thing I Saw (Heard) This Morning
      Odors From the Kitchen
      Early Morning Scenes
      Christmas Dinner
      Washing My Hair
      Sounds in the Classroom

   b. Simple sentences can record sensory experiences. For example:

      Sight - I saw the sluggish train going up the hill.
      Taste - I tasted the chocolate creamy pudding.
      Touch - I touched the rough corrugated pasteboard on the top of the box.
      Smell - I smelled the leaves burning in the crisp October air.
      Sound - I heard the crackle of leaves under my feet as I walked through the forest.

   c. Awareness of words that relate to sensory experiences can be developed by asking students to fill in the blanks with appropriate words.

      The _____ of rain on the roof of the house woke me up.

The _____ of the bell called me to school.

The _____ of brakes frightened me.

d. Develop various vocabularies to aid in writing about experiences. Some examples are:

Colors - green, blue, red, white, purple, tan, yellow, dark blue, light blue, navy blue, soldier blue, Kelly green, emerald green, silvery, gold, as white as snow, as green as grass, as purple as grapes

Sizes - small, smaller, smallest, large, larger, largest, narrow, wide, enormous, minute, spacious, medium

Shapes - round, square, oblong, rectangle, triangle, T-shape, V-shape, L-shape, U-shape, egg shape, C-shape, cylinder, slender, roly-poly

Sounds - hum, clap, buzz, crackle, clang, ring bump, soft, loud, screech, tap, whistle, harsh, rattle, chug, zoom, snore, bark, cheep, honk, sigh, creak, toot, slam, shout, drop, bounce, ring, bang, hiss

Touch - smooth, rough, soft, hard, stiff, limp, scratch, soft, fuzzy, bumpy, rubbery, icy, cold, hot, slick, waxy, sandy, gritty, fluffy, chilly

Odors - musty, fresh, pugent, sweet, pine, garlic, burned, smoky, stale

Taste - sweet, sour, spicy, dry, juicy, yummy, delicious, bitter, crunchy, crisp, raw, greasy, chewy, mushy

What we touch - wood, glass, furniture, cloth, paper, books, desks, eraser, rubber, grass, people, metal, hair

What we taste - desserts, bread, vegetables, milk candy, meat

What we feel - wind, frightened, happy, unhappy, snow, rain, puzzled, anxious, proud, thankful, sad, peaceful

What we see - people, houses, plants, cars, buildings, toys, decorations, animals

What we hear - noises, talking, laughter, knocking, machines, lawn mowers, screaming, footsteps, yelling, running

What we smell - paint, gasoline, flowers, tobacco, soap, food, spices

2. Use community resource people as stimuli for language experiences.

   a. Identify people in the community.

      The one who brings the mail is the _____.

      The person who helps to keep us well is the _____.

      The man who directs traffic after school is the _____.

      The woman who helps us on the telephone is the _____.

   b. Discuss the duties, contributions, dress, and equipment of community resource people.

   c. Students write stories and/or paragraphs about a community resource person.

3. Integrate language experience with content areas.

   Many opportunities present themselves for reinforcing subject matter with various language arts activities. The opportunities include:

   a. Summarizing a Science Experiment
   b. Reporting on a Current Event
   c. Summarizing Information from an Encyclopedia
   d. Writing Math Problems
   e. Making Graph Showing Rainfall

   In reality, any activity which involves summarizing, reporting, outlining, making charts, graphs or tables, writing announcements, ads or letters, etc. are language experience activities.

4. Use films, filmstrips and tapes to build a background of experience. Films, filmstrips, and tapes are available on various topics pertinent to unit studies, color, sound and interests of students. Language experience may include:

   a. Showing part of a film and students write ending.
   b. Summarizing the major findings or main ideas in the film and filmstrip or on the tape.
   c. Describing a person or an event.

5. Write autobiographies or biographies of a friend or person.

   a. Discuss ways to describe people.

      height: _____ -inches tall

      weight: _____ -pounds

      eyes: blue, brown, gray, hazel, twinkling, etc.

      hair: brown, curly, short, long blond, shouder-length, etc.

      clothes: red shirt, corduroy shirt, blue belt, striped shirt, green jumper, black boots, etc.

characteristics: punctual, kind, gentle, neat, etc.

activities: class president, plays ball, collects stamps, scout, etc.

b. Discuss reasons for liking a person.

c. Have students write a biographical or autobiographical sentence, paragraph(s), etc.

6. Use holidays, seasons, and special events.

a. Develop special vocabulary. For example:

Halloween: Jack-o'lantern, mask, trick and treat, costumes, spooks, witches, cats, etc.

b. Ask questions.

What are the things we do at this particular time?
Do we dress a special way?
What do we see at this time?
What do we hear, taste, and smell?

c. Have students to write about a holiday season or special event.

7. Use current events, newspaper articles, ads or advertisement.

a. Ask student to listen to newscasts and bring in newspaper ads or articles.

b. Discuss these reports.

c. Use the who, what, where, when and why approach to understanding news reports. Discuss propaganda techniques in advertisement.

d. Have students write a summary of a news item.

e. Have students write an article, or an ad, for the newspaper.

8. Use literature to inspire writing.

a. Discuss books, stories, and poems read by the students.

b. Have student:

Write a character sketch of his favorite character.
Write about the most exciting event in the story.
Write a different ending to the story.
Write about what you liked most about the book.
Write poetry.

9. Plan field trip.

a. Discuss field trip with student.

Develop vocabulary.
Ask questions to focus attention on "things to look for."

b. Discuss field trip afterwards.

c. Write paragraphs, etc. Topics may include:

Our Field Trip
The Most Interesting Thing I Saw

10. Use specific comprehension skills to stimulate writing.

Example:

a. Sequential order

b. Figures of Speech

c. Characterization

d. Drawing Conclusion

e. Interpreting illustrative material

Student would write using these skills. Some suggestions would be a description of a garden using figures of speech, a story told in sequential order, a description of a character in a book, drawing a conclusion from what is written in an editorial on constructing a graph to show daily attendance.

11. Record conversation.

Student recalls a conversation and writes it.

12. Encourage writing about imaginative experience.

a. Use fictional literature to illustrate how authors write from imagination.

b. Assign topics, such as:

If I Were a Bird
I Wish I Were a King

13. Use immediate environment.

The environment of a student can motivate thinking, discussion, and writing. Some ideas that can be gleaned from the environment are:

a. Objects in the room

b. Seasonal signs

c. Weather

d. Sounds

e. Clothing

f. Stories read by the teacher

14. Use opportunities for practical writing, such as announcement, letter writing, notice, record, chart, and invitations.

Activities may include:

a. Writing invitation to parents concerning a classroom play.

b. Thank-you notes to the lunchroom helpers for preparing meals.

c. Charts for class plans for the week, vocabulary, good manners or behavior standards, daily schedules, classification (food, plants, animals, homes, etc.) directions for writing or telling a story, duties for the week, etc.

Experience:

Stimulation of thought about body processes or health.

(This could be done with all of the body parts.)

Procedure:

1. Begin by telling the children to imagine that they are a hand and a finger.
2. Discuss the function of the hand and the finger.

Example:

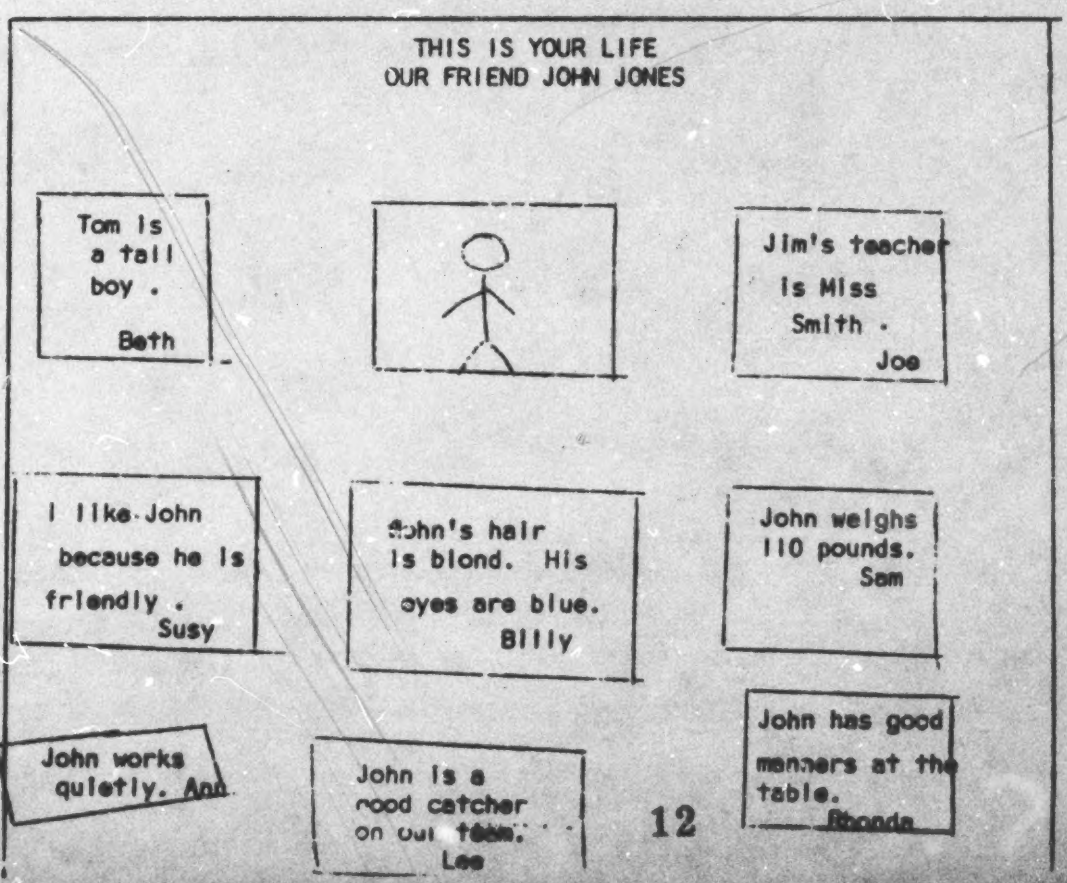
My hand and my fingers are very important. They help me to button my clothes and eat. My fingers tell me if something is hot, cold, smooth or rough. I can dial a telephone and open a door with them. They help me write and turn the pages of my book.

Experience:

Thinking about a friend.

Procedures:

1. Discuss ways to describe a friend -- appearance, manners, activities, etc.
2. Develop vocabulary for description.
3. Think of reasons for liking the friend.
4. Choose one friend each week until each child is recognized. Display the writings of students on bulletin board, entitled "Our Friend _____." Make a booklet for the student after the bulletin board has been dismantled for another student to be focused.



When I was coming to school I saw _____.

In my home yesterday I heard _____.

As I was sitting in the yard one day I smelled _____.

I like the taste of _____.

My best characteristic is _____.

2. Write a paragraph or story about "My Family."

3. Finish the sentences.

   The funniest moment I ever had was _____.

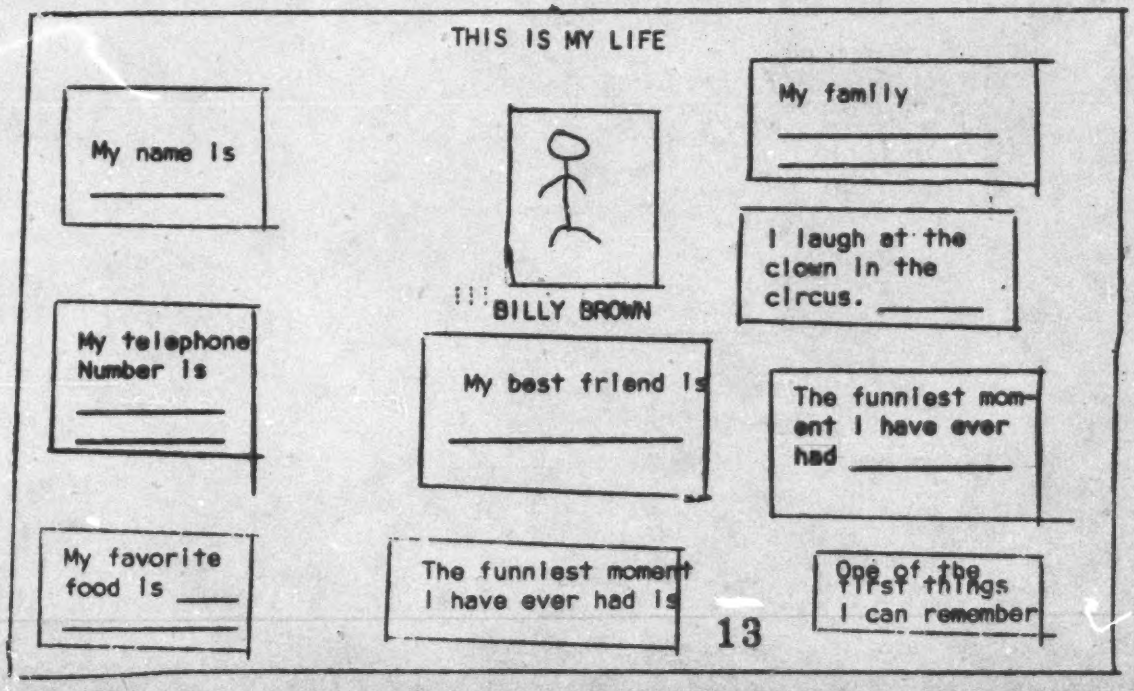
   One of the first things I can remember is _____.

4. Write five sentences that tell what you do. Tell where and when you do each thing.

   Example:

   I sing in the bath tub when I am happy.

5. When the student has finished writing about his life display "This is My Life" on the bulletin board. Later put in a booklet for him. Be sure each student writes about his life and put it on display.


THIS IS MY LIFE
My name is
My family
I laugh at the clown in the circus.
BILLY BROWN
My telephone Number is
My best friend is
The funniest moment I have ever had
My favorite food is
The funniest moment I have ever had is
One of the first things I can remember

Experience:

Student thinks about his life.

Procedures:

1. Stimulate the student to think and write about his life in the following ways:

My name is _____.

I am _____ years old.

My birthday is _____ is.

The color of my hair is _____.

I am _____ inches tall.

I weigh _____ pounds.

My telephone number is _____.

My address is _____.

The subject I like best in school is _____.

My hobby is _____ .

When I grow up, I want to be _____.

The season I like best is _____.

My favorite food is _____.

My favorite color is _____.

My favorite game is _____ .

My favorite holiday is _____.

My favorite book is _____.

My favorite TV program is _____.

Experiences:

Think of the winter time.

Procedures:

1. Talk about the types of clothing worn in the winter.
2. Talk about the outdoor activities during winter (snowball fights, sledding, making a snowman, etc.)
3. Discuss changes in the grass and trees during the winter.
4. Ask these questions for stimulation.

   Where do birds go in the winter?

   What months do we have winter?

   How can the thermometer tell us it is winter?

   What happens to the lakes, ponds, streets in the winter?
5. Write about the season, winter.

Example:

Wintertime

During the wintertime we wear coats and boots. Sometimes my nose and feet get cold in the winter. Some people get a cold and flu. Cars get stuck in the snow. There are times when we don't have to go to school when it snows a lot.

Lonnie

Experience:

Using community helpers and workers to observe and find out the duties and contributions of these people.

Procedures:

1. Identify different occupations and/or community helpers such as policemen, truck driver, doctor, etc.
2. Have students select a particular occupation to find out more about it. Ask these questions for stimulation:

   What is the occupation or service?

   What does the person do?

   How does he help us?

   How does the person dress?

   Does he use any tools or equipment?
3. Have student to write about the person he has chosen.

Example:

The Nurse

My neighbor is a nurse. She dresses in a white dress and white shoes. I see her in the doctor's office when I go for a check-up. Sometimes she gives me a shot, but it does not hurt.

Betty

The Artist

I see Mr. Smith in the park some days when I go gome from school. He is an artist. He stands before his easel with his brush in hand. He dips his brush in the paint and makes pretty pictures. He sometimes displays his picture in the mall at the shopping center.

Bruce

Experience:

The class looks at one of the chairs or desks in the room.

Procedures:

1. Ask the student to tell what material the chair or desk is made of.
2. Discuss where the material comes from.
3. Discuss the various steps from the time the tree is planted until it is a chair and/or desk.
4. Discuss how many people work to make the chair and get it to the consumer.

Example:

My Desk

My desk,use to be a tiny seed. A man planted the seed and a little tree grew. The little tree was planted on a big tree farm. After a lot of years the tree got very big. The tree was cut down and then made into lumber. Then a carpenter made my desk.

Experience:

Think of all the things you see, taste, hear, smell, feel at the fair (or some other place).

Procedures:

1. Name the things you see, taste, hear, smell, and feel, and hear at the county fair.

   Put these on a chart.

   Example:

   See -- rides, animals, clowns, exhibits

   Hear -- music, laughter, voices, howls

   Feel -- sticky candy, sawdust under feet

   Taste -- candy apples, hot dogs, French fries, ice cream

   Touch -- sticky apple, rubbery balloons

2. Discuss these sensory experiences at the Fair.
3. Have student write story --"My Trip to the Fair."

Example:

My Trip to the Fair

The county fair comes once a year. We get a half-day holiday to go with free tickets. There are many rides. If you like a fast scary ride, the roller coaster is the ride for you. The horses on the merry-go- round goes up and down to the beat of music. The ferris wheel takes you on a panoramic view of the fair ground. Exhibits in the tents are interesting. There are cakes, pickles, old cars, flower, animals and many other things. Our class had an exhibit on conversation. We even got first prize.

The aroma of food -- hotdogs, French fries, candy apples -- makes you hungry. It is better to eat after you have ridden on the rides. Sometimes a full stomach and jolts from rides don't mix too well!

Experience:

Listening to sounds.

Procedures:

1. Have the children to listen to sounds over a period of days.
2. Stimulate listening awareness by asking these questions.

   What are the sounds you hear in the city?

   What are the sounds you hear in the country?

   What are the sounds people make?

   What are the sounds animals make?

   What are the sounds trucks, cars, trains, and buses make?
3. Develop a chart of sounds.

   clang scream thump clatter yell

   sizzle whistle zoom tattle rumble

   shriek rat-a-tat hiss whine click
4. Write about sounds you hear.

Example:

Sounds of Trucks

Trucks make low rumbles on the highway as they roll along at a steady pace. If they stop suddenly, the tires squeal and squeak until the truck comes to a screeching halt.

Experience:

Think of what jobs people do and how winter affects their jobs.

Procedures:

1. Talk about how some people have jobs where they work in buildings all the time.
2. Ask the students to think of jobs where people work outdoors.
3. Ask if these people can work in winter. Some can (skier, etc.) and some cannot (gardeners, farmers, lawn mowers, construction workers, etc.)
4. Ask these questions.

   What does your daddy, brother, uncle, or friend do on his job?

   Can he work in winter?
5. Write about someone's job and how wintertime affects the worker.

Example:

My Uncle's Job

My uncle works with a construction company. He helps with the building of expressways. During the winter, he does not get to work all of the time. He says concrete will not get hard when it is very cold. When he does not work, he does not get paid. That is not too good!

Experience:

Record experiences in a class diary for a given length of time.

Procedures:

1. Encourage each student to make an entry in the diary.
2. Encourage entries in the diary pertaining to the whole class.

Example:

Class Diary

January 5

I made a huge snowman. He had black buttons for his eyes, a carrot for his nose, and red felt for his mouth.

Bobby

January 7

Today we saw a movie about the different kinds of transportation. There are cars, trucks, airplanes, trains, and boats. Our transportation to school is by bicycles, buses, cars, and feet.

The Class

Experience:

The imaginary thoughts of the students.

Procedures:

1. Explain to students that they are going to use their imagination to write a story.
2. Stimulate thinking by these questions.

   What animal would you like to be?

   How does this animal look?

   How does this animal feel?

   Why would you like to be this animal?

   Where does this animal live?

   What does this animal do?

Examples:

If I Were a Giraffe

If I were a giraffe, it would please my mother very much. When she is trying to find something on the top shelf, she would not have to strain to reach it. I could find it because I am so tall, three times as tall as most men. My long neck could be used like an arm, and knock it down to her. She would not have to buy a winter coat, for I would always have a brown and white coat to wear. My soft "moo" would not disturb her like the screaming and yelling of boys and girls.

If I were a giraffe, I could run faster than children. I could see many things at one time, for my eyes would permit me to see behind, in front and to the sides. My long neck would help me to get fruit and tender leaves from the tree. I would be the tallest animal in the world.

Experience:

Using community helpers and workers to observe and find out the duties and contributions of these people.

Procedures:

1. Identify different occupations and/or community helpers such as policemen, truck driver, doctor, etc.
2. Have students select a particular occupation to find out more about it. Ask these questions for stimulation:

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   How does the person dress?

   Does he use any tools or equipment?
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Betty

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I see Mr. Smith in the park some days when I go gome from school. He is an artist. He stands before his easel with his brush in hand. He dips his brush in the paint and makes pretty pictures. He sometimes displays his picture in the mall at the shopping center.

Bruce

Experience:

A conversation with another person.

Procedures:

1. Discuss different ways of saying "said" -- replied, stated, answered, exclaimed, called, sighed, urged, etc
2. Discuss different ways of saying "asked" -- inquired, etc.
3. Review use of quotation marks in quoting someone.
4. The student writes a conversation that he has heard between two people.

Example:

The Big Decision

Mother said, "I baked three kinds of cookies today - chocolate, butterscotch, and peanubutter."

"They look scrumptious," I said.

"Would you like to have some?" she asked.

"Yes, I want one of each," I replied.